

**City of Falcon Heights  
City Hall  
2077 Larpenteur Avenue West**

**Minutes  
Planning Commission Meeting  
Tuesday, May 28, 2019  
7:00 PM**

A. CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order by John Larkin at 7:00 PM.

B. ROLL CALL:

Present: Larkin, Williams, Gerich, Wilson, Kotelnicki, Samatar

Absent: Stemper

Present Staff and Council Liaisons: Markon, Harris

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: April 23, 2019

**The minutes were approved as presented by unanimous consent.**

D. AGENDA

1. Hold a Public Hearing to consider rezoning the property at 1667 Snelling Ave N from B-3 to PUD

After the sale of the TIES/Sourcewell building at 1667 Snelling Ave N, the new owner, Buhl GTA, LP has requested the rezoning of the property, now called The Amber Union, to a PUD to allow for a mixed-use renovation that includes affordable housing and small retail.

Chairman Larkin invites Staff Markon to introduce the planned project. Markon introduces the topic and the order in which discussions in the meeting will take place. Markon states that all questions from the public and committee will be allowed following his presentation. Markon described the project (see plan).

Chairman Larkin described the public meeting ground rules and introduced the Buhl representative, Mr. Peter Deanovic, and invited him to the podium to describe the project. Mr. Peter Deanovic described the project, and the topics that included:

- Description of the building's history
- Description of the majority of the work to be done on the interior to convert existing offices to apartments and some retail
- Because of the historical nature of the building, some original interiors will be saved such as flooring in the cafeteria, elevators, auditorium, conference room, interior front lobby and other areas
- A coffee shop (or other small business of similar nature) with access to the outdoor patio

Chairman Larkin now opened the discussion to the public in attendance, asking for questions and/or comments.

A public member expressed a concern about increased traffic congestion.

- Peter from Buhl responded by saying that they had no plans to change the traffic circulation and that the conversion to apartments would likely decrease the traffic issues vs the current offices.

A public member expressed concern about the lack of enclosed parking and other issues that may cause higher noise levels.

- Peter from Buhl responded by saying that the project will not include enclosed parking, the new generators on the property will be quieter, and there will be less traffic congestion (and noise) with apartments since vehicles will be coming and going at different times vs all at the same time as with an office environment.

Larkin asked if the traffic can travel between the west and east parking areas.

- Peter from Buhl responded by saying "Yes".

A public member asked if it would be necessary to take away a portion of the front lawn bordering Snelling in order to increase the parking area.

- Peter from Buhl responded by saying "Yes", in order to add the necessary parking spaces, two additional rows of parking must replace an area of the front lawn.

A public member expressed concern about the lack of a greater number of larger 3 and 4 bedroom apartments, since family sizes statistically are growing, and also more parking for at least two cars per apartment would be needed to accommodate the larger apartments.

- Peter from Buhl responded by saying that they followed accepted statistics to come up with the current and appropriate number of all apartments as well as the number of parking spaces per apartment.

A public member expressed concern about the basement windows extending enough above grade, and if screening of the rooftop HVAC would comply with the historical nature of the building.

- Peter from Buhl responded by saying that the foundation extended 3 feet above grade making basement windows feasible, and the screened HVAC on the roof does work with accepted historical building guidelines.

A public member expressed concern about overflow vehicles from the apartment building, parking on Hollywood Court streets.

- Both Chairman Larkin and Peter from Buhl responded by saying that no parking on Hollywood Court would be expected or likely allowed.

A public member asked for the meaning of PUD and why the USDA was not able to buy the building and inquired about any income restrictions in place.

- Staff Markon responded with PUD stands for "Planned Unit Development" and proceeded to describe the zoning concept and Peter from Buhl described the reason the USDA did not purchase the building was due to the fact that Falcon Heights building did not make the cut over those in Madison, WI and Kansas, and because it took them too long to make a decision (9 months). Peter from Buhl says they will follow MHFA income guidelines in the new Amber Union apartments.

A public member asked about the possibility of adding more trees to the fenced border between Hollywood Court and the Amber Union site along the property line.

- Peter from Buhl responded by saying that they will be adding many trees but none along the fence on the property line.

A public member asked about the possibility of adding additional police and fire personnel to handle an apartment complex.

- Peter from Buhl responded by saying that he will talk to the City Council about adding additional services. Larkin, Markon and Harris all commented that the increased tax base provided by the Amber Union would potentially make a better argument for increasing these services.

A public member asked about the possibility of a decrease in property value of the nearby homes due to the conversion to apartments.

- Kotelnicki mentioned that the question would be best answered by a Real Estate Assessor. Peter from Buhl responded by saying that he would expect no change in value of the surrounding properties.

A public member asked if an additional school bus stop would be added.

- Peter from Buhl responded by saying that there are no plans to add a school bus stop now.

A public member asked if there would be any additional cost to the City to convert to apartments vs offices.

- Markon and Harris both commented that there will be no additional cost to the City, in fact, the increased tax base provided by the Amber Union apartments vs tax free offices will potentially lower the cost.

A public member asked about what the benefits to nearby owners (and/or the City) to the conversion to apartments and retail.

- Peter from Buhl responded by saying that benefits may include the fact that the building will potentially be 100% full, there will be many cosmetic improvements, no-tear down necessary, only conversion and mostly interior improvements, providing fewer disruptions to the community.

A public member asked if interior renovations would comply with the historical status of the building, if underground or covered parking can be added, have traffic issues been addressed by other entities, and if Workforce or Section 8 housing have been considered.

- Peter from Buhl responded by saying that some interiors (and the majority of the exterior of the building) will be retained, keeping the historical status, due to the high price, no underground garage or covered garage has been considered, the traffic flow and parking on the site have been evaluated by both MnDOT and Ramsey County, and no Section 8 housing or any other low-income housing applications have been made.

A brief discussion took place between committee members regarding the recently adopted rule that no public hearing proceed past 8:30 pm. The Committee decided to allow three more questions past 8:30 pm.

A public member expressed concerns about security with the building to be apartments instead of offices.

- Peter from Buhl responded by saying that the site, by the way it has been designed, will become a buffer to Hollywood Court, potentially reducing security concerns.

A public member expressed concerns about the traffic issues caused by the retail (food service) businesses proposed for the property.

- Peter from Buhl responded by saying that the planned Coffee Shop is one of the best uses for the site. Other retail (food service) businesses to be added at a later date will maximize space at the old garage.

Chairman Larkin closed the public meeting and opened the discussion to the Planning Commission members, asking for questions and/or comments.

Wilson expressed concerns about there being no exterior windows (for egress) in the Annex portion of the building. He mentioned that he would also like to see more trees around the east side parking area (along Snelling Ave.)

- Peter from Buhl responded by saying that there will be some windows added to the Annex portion of the building.

Kotelnicki asked if Buhl would be seeking a historical designation for the building and also asked if there was any kind of a security system or plan for the property.

- Peter from Buhl responded by saying that, yes, they will be filing for historical designation, and their security system will include security fobs used for entering the building.

Samatar commented that she was glad to see these apartments in Falcon Heights and asked if Buhl would consider adding more 4 bedroom apartments. Also, Samatar asked if there would be security cameras present on the property.

- Peter from Buhl responded by saying that expense has been the biggest reason for being unable to add more 4 bedroom units. Peter also stated that there would be cameras, with fisheye lenses, located throughout the property for security. He also stated that security and security systems have been a top priority for them in the designing of this building.

Larkin commented that the PUD is requested for only Parcel 1, and not Parcel 2 and 3 at this time, in a phasing process. Larkin asked about how the residents would know who is allowed to park and if violators could be identified? Also, will there be EV charging stations located in the parking areas?

- Peter from Buhl responded by saying that the residents will require proof of parking authorization in order to park in the lots. Also, infrastructure for five EV parking outlets will be provided in the new parking areas on the east side.

Councilmember Harris commented that Buhl has owned other buildings in other areas for long periods of time and will likely be long-term owners in Falcon Heights.

Chairman Larkin announced that he would need a recommendation from the Committee, at some point, in order to move forward with the current plans. Kotelnicki asked about the 5% allowance for changes that is mentioned in the "Control of PUD During Work" section of the Request For Planning Commission Action, is 5% of what?.

- Peter from Buhl responded by saying that the Park Service has not yet reviewed the property for any changes, so additional expense could occur.

Council Harris said that the City Council will next review the plan. Staff Markon added that the Commission's purpose is to make recommendations and suggestions to the Council to assist in their decision making process.

Wilson suggested that there be security present during the State Fair time, in the east parking lot (Snelling Avenue side), to prevent parking by non-residents.

Commissioner Wilson motioned: **To proceed with the development of a PUD for 1667 Snelling Ave N, Falcon Heights, MN. For a detailed security plan to be added to the development documentation, and consideration given to not expanding the parking on the East side and instead expand the parking on the West side into Parcel 2 or 3.**

Commissioner Kotelnicki seconded.

**The motion was approved by unanimous consent.**

#### E. INFORMATION AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Markon announced that the yearly Ice Cream Social will be held on Thursday, July 18<sup>th</sup> this year. At least one Planning Commission member will be in attendance. Also, John Labalestra, will continue to have discussions with the committee regarding his proposed townhome development project located in a vacant lot in Labalestra Park on Tatum Street.

#### F. ADJOURN

Adjourned at 8:40 PM.

#### G. WORKSHOP

1. Public member, Jesse Nickols, described his proposal to pave an area on his property on Larpenteur Avenue for the purpose of providing paid parking during the State Fair and other times. A discussion followed.